

We Are Not Alone

Krzysztof Koehler

I saw a Guardian Angel who commanded me to follow him. In a split second I found myself in a foggy and fiery place filled with a great mass of suffering souls. They prayed fervently, but their prayers could not help them; only we on earth could usher in help. The flames that burned them were touching me too. My Guardian Angel kept close to me all the time. I asked these souls, what hurts them most? They all gave the same answer: the longing for God. I saw the Mother of God visiting these purgatory souls; they called her "Star of the Sea." Her presence brought some respite. . . .

At a certain time of night I was visited by a Sister who died two months earlier. She was from an upper-class family. I saw her in a terrible state: she was burning all over and her face was distorted by a painful grimace. She stayed with me for a short while and then disappeared. I shuddered, because I did not know whether she came from hell or from purgatory, and I increased my prayers for her. The following night she came again looking even worse. The flames were more terrible and her face reflected total despair. I was surprised that after all the prayers I offered for her there was no relief. I therefore asked, have my prayers not helped you? She answered that they have not and will not. I asked again whether the prayers the entire Congregation of Sisters offered for her helped her. She again said that they were of no help to her but that they helped other souls. I said: "If my prayers do not help you, please do not come to me again." She immediately disappeared. . . .

As soon as I lay down I fell asleep, but around 11 o'clock the devil upset my bed. I woke up immediately and began to pray to my Guardian Angel. Then suddenly I saw souls in the purgatory: they were like shadows, and among them I saw many devils. One of them shaped like a cat tried to provoke me by throwing himself onto my bed and on my feet, and he seemed to weigh hundreds of pounds. . . .

S. Faustina Kowalska, *Diary* [1938]

The reason for these lengthy quotations from St. Faustina is that she is a guide and an authority concerning the ceremonial of *dziady*, or ritual commemoration of one's ancestors celebrated in the Eastern European countryside for centuries. It involves placating the spirits by offering them food and invoking the souls of the deceased. The ritual I wish to describe is not identical to the one described in Adam Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady Part II* [1823]. That is to say, the ceremonies of the ritual are the same but the goal is different. One might say that the goal is more spiritual and less material but nonetheless very real, perhaps

even more real than the physical ceremonies invoked by the poet in *Dziady Part II*.

Mickiewicz presented *dziady* as a yearly ritual taking place somewhere in Belarusian provinces (then regarded as eastern Poland), officiated by the Spiritual Man. As Mickiewicz states in his introduction to *Dziady Part II*, *dziady* was a ritual rooted in paganism, one already pushed to the margins of society in his time. But the poet considerably enlarged its moral and spiritual meaning in later works, particularly in *Dziady Part III* [1832]. As a result, our perception of *dziady* is more serious; it points to something deeply rooted and essential to our being since as long as we live we can bargain with the eternal enemy of man and wrest away from him his not-so-innocent victims. The greatest works of Polish literature and the spirituality of its greatest master, Adam Mickiewicz, provide us with the courage necessary to undertake these daring forays.

2

On January 4, 1842, Mickiewicz lectured at Collège de France on the Polish moral epic, or the Memoirs of Augustyn Kordecki, Paulist Father and Abbot of the Sanctuary of Jasna Góra at the time when the Swedes laid siege to it. Mickiewicz sarcastically remarked that in the "enlightened" nineteenth century few people might want to read the memoirs of a mere priest from the remote past. Toward the end of his lecture, when his hoarse voice and unsteady gait indicated fatigue, Mickiewicz delved into the question of what would have happened if Jasna Góra had fallen to the Lutheran Swedes, that is if someone (and such attempts continue to be made today) managed to extirpate Catholicism from Poland. Mickiewicz comments thus:

Let us reflect on the possible influence of Protestantism on Poland. Let us first look at some European countries that either shed off Catholicism or where its influence has been weakened. Great Britain managed to marry Protestantism to its feudal structures, and she survived intact as a nation and state. Likewise, the Roman legal structures, so strongly rooted in France, would have made France survive as a nation and state if it went fully Protestant. Germany is strongly rooted in its pagan past which could carry the country forward in case of a loss of

Catholic belief. But in Poland a blow to Catholicism has always acted to weaken the state. All Polish structures and social customs, military and civilian, are based on a strong belief in direct ties between this world and the transcendent one. Poles believe in miracles that are visible signs of that connection. The entire moral and political strength of the Polish state organism is grounded in that belief. One has to appeal to that faith whenever it is necessary to bring forth the nation's power, either to resist or to lunge forth at the enemies.

I posit that Mickiewicz's *Dziady Part III* is best interpreted as a realization, visualization, and application of the belief in the closeness of the two worlds, material and spiritual. I also think that it is the greatest work ever written by a Polish author.

3

Yet it is difficult to talk about *Dziady Part III* not because an entire library of scholarly texts has been written about this unusual drama, but because—such is my deepest conviction—this work is more than just literature. This “more” springs at us whenever we reread the play or see it performed onstage.

Dziady Part III is a ritual. The Spiritual Man who presides over the ritual is the author himself, and the participants are those who read his work. Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady Part III* is a remarkable spiritual ceremony, and each rereading of this drama—if it is reread properly—equals participation in a ritual during which the reader—please do not fear the language—participates in an invocation of a spiritual entity. *Dziady Part III* is related to the same ritual as *Dziady Part II*, but the spiritual entity invoked in each drama is not the same. The two spiritual entities speak in different voices, and the reader is trying to be of assistance to an entirely different spiritual world in *Part III* than in *Part II*.

What entities do I have in mind? I will try to describe them.

4

Dziady Part III presents various human characters *in extremis*. Those unjustly imprisoned, Father Peter, the Romantic poet Conrad, those who frequent Warsaw's best

drawing rooms, Mrs. Rollison, Senator Novosiltsev, Pelican, the doctor, ladies, gentlemen, and young people at the Vilnius ball; Eve from a country manor “near Lviv” who prays for the imprisoned poet. Banal as it may sound, these characters are formulas into which the poet tries to lock the Polish fate—traitors, heroes, suffering mothers, those who want to remain part of the elite at any price, career men, virgins from country manors praying for the persecuted in front of pictures of the Virgin Mary. Mickiewicz is the only Polish writer who ever succeeded in committing to paper these Polish archetypes and who tried to hold up a mirror to the typical characters of Polish history but by holding up this mirror he also reinforced certain features of the Polish fate. A mother worried about her son imprisoned by ruthless persecutors? How many such mothers preceded Mrs. Rollison and how many succeeded her! The same can be said about her son and those like him who spent Christmas Eve in prison cells. For centuries they have been subject to black humor covering up despair. Was it not likewise during the 1944 Warsaw Rising, or the 1970 massacre of workers on the Baltic coast, or during the 1863 Rising when hundreds of Eves in country manors were praying for their beloveds languishing in Russian jails. Their silent tragedies were later presented on canvas by painter Artur Grottger. Unfortunately, not all of these characters are positive, innocent, and worthy of our sympathy. The sculptor of Polish fate, Adam Mickiewicz, also presents those who could not care less about sacrifice and righteousness. As stated above, he was a reinforcer of the Polish ways of dealing with adversity. Was he the author of the curse of Polish fate? The creator of a mirror in which consecutive generations saw themselves and from which they could not escape?

Look at the Warsaw drawing rooms in the 1830s frequented by the elites. The fog of intellectual discussions envelops them; the worried elites and *littérateurs* who know better distance themselves with repulsion and fear from what they see in the streets. I have to confess that I had a vision of these salons when I stood—part of the mob—in front of Warsaw's Presidential Palace in 2010 when I listened to highbrow radio and salon discussions

imperceptibly aligned with fear of the street. . . of the mob.

For who are the flatterers and refined individuals gathered around Senator Novosiltsev in Vilnius in 1830? They are the sort that, when pictures are being taken, always try to stand as close to Power as possible. Those who fish for party invitations and sail skillfully to find themselves—together with others like them and with a glass of wine in hand—near those who wield Power that they gladly address just at the moment when the camera flashes to get that flash on one's face at any price. They do not do so in vain and they do not do it for free. It so happens that after April 2010 I was in both places, with people in the streets—when the awakened Spirit was moving the crowd—and also, briefly, among the elite. I experienced firsthand the alienation of those who tried to ingratiate themselves with the authorities and those in the streets who expressed their fidelity to the deceased president. I was in the mob and also among the intellectuals. It was in April 2010.

Please do not misunderstand me: I am presenting here my perception of reality, one indebted to *Dziady Part III*, because this work suggests certain ways of perceiving reality, of assuming a position, of listening to the echo. It foretells what will be multiplied a thousandfold in Polish history.

And what about Russia? In *Dziady* Russian rule is presented as the major enemy of Poland, not only in “Ustęp” (which is an exceptionally penetrating poetic description of the system of Russian rule that remains constant in spite of governmental and political changes), but also in the introduction, the prosaic and historical introduction to the text; and also in the characters (Senator Novosiltsev and his dream, Novosiltsev and his cynical manipulation of Mrs. Rollison). The Russian party of power, motivated by some kind of cynical fascination, simply wishes to wipe out Polishness from the face of the earth—wipe out, humiliate, make it sink forever. But characteristically, Mickiewicz also presents those Russians who are victims of the party of power, and as such are potential allies since they too are persecuted. I am therefore not at all surprised by the decision of the party of power in Soviet-occupied Poland to

forbid the performance of *Dziady Part III* in 1968. They understood well the meaning of the play.

After Smolensk 2010, we can further ponder the role of Russians as the subject matter of *Dziady*. We can see the sacrifice, but we also perceive the imperial power that manifests itself in arrogance and has built a system based on police informers. Indeed, *Dziady Part III* is a revolutionary work. As long as it is read it will exercise an influence on Polishness; it will conceive of Polishness as a project, a vision outlined by the greatest Polish poet.

But there is more.

5

If it were not for the fact that *Dziady Part III* is part of what was described at the beginning of this article as “the foundation of Polishness” and is the best articulation of this foundation—it would have remained a magnificent text that dealt with Polishness and reflected on it poetically, but would not have deserved the place in Polish consciousness I have ascribed to it. I am not referring here to the New Age-style of acting demonstrated by Krzysztof Majchrzak who played the Spiritual Man in a television performance a few years ago, but rather to the foundational (how else can I call it?) perception by Mickiewicz, followed by an ability to articulate the truth about the spiritual nature of reality and inscribing this constant into the narrative called Poland.

As befits an epic story, *Dziady Part III* unveils what is commonly called “reality;” it shows people who act, think, make choices, argue rationally or emotionally, and so on. But above this reality, or perhaps preceding it, the play also articulates a spiritual reality. Throughout it there appear references to the spirits of darkness and light that surround physical reality, make suggestions, pass judgments, and mislead or protect the human characters. The permanent presence of that other (spiritual) dimension manifests itself in the characters' dreams—Conrad's and Eva's dreams, Father Peter's vision, Senator Novosiltsev's dream. Sometimes this transcendent reality descends to the stage and mingles with physical characters (angels and spirits become elements of the plot). In one of the key moments the double nature of reality

makes itself known through exorcisms. Watch this scene! Father Peter, who exorcises Conrad, also heads the investigation team concerning Mrs. Rollison's son!

The spiritual and the physical spheres are so intermingled in *Dziady* that it is impossible to decide which one is more "real." Continuity or, better said, unity between the two spheres is incessantly proclaimed. I know that traditional criticism sees Mickiewicz's drama through the lens of literary conventions rather than through an awareness of spiritual realities. The run-of-the-mill Polonists have been afraid to face that other dimension of humanity, and they are adamantly opposed to admitting that the learned and great poet Adam Mickiewicz looked at things differently. They have created a methodological cage guarding them from looking into the abyss. They toy with the worry beads of various symbolic forms, eruditely discuss associations, show off their hermeneutical skills, all in order to protect themselves—and us—from the striking fact that Mickiewicz did not begin *Dziady Part III* with a "literary prologue" (Juliusz Słowacki tried to assert its literariness without understanding anything; he was the first to mislead us!), but rather with an introduction to the atmosphere that was to prevail in the drama, a hint about the kind of reality in which the dramatic ritual was to unfold. The key scene first presents the Guardian Angel, and then the dark spirits tormenting the young Poet's undecided soul. The Angel—who soon will engage in a battle with the spirits of darkness for the Poet's soul—pronounces these words:

*Unkind and unfeeling child!
Your mother's earthly accomplishments
And her supplications in the other world
Defended your youth from temptation and
misadventure
For quite a long while . . .*

These words, spoken at the beginning of the drama, proclaim the most important dimension of the two realities, earthly and spiritual. The poet's mother's virtues and her entreaties to God in the other world support her son in this world. These worlds reveal the deepest sense of Mickiewicz's drama, its central idea: that of

intercession, of links between the two realities established through prayer for one another.

St. Faustina Kowalska writes about Satan's anger toward and his hatred of the idea of prayerful intercession. She personally experienced this, whereas Mickiewicz merely described it (perhaps he experienced it too, we do not know). The power of intercessional prayer is revealed in the monologue of the Spirit at the end of the Prologue:

*Men! Each of you could erect and destroy thrones
Through your thought and faith, even if you were
alone and in prison.*

The characters in *Dziady Part III* are thus protected by their mutual prayer and sacrifice. This network restrains the Enemy and drains away his power. Conrad and Father Peter, the two key characters in *Dziady*, meet only twice: first during the exorcism ceremony when Father Peter exorcises the Poet who has surrendered to Evil; and in the last scene when the jailed Conrad is led away for an investigation and encounters the priest on his way. At that moment Conrad does not recognize Father Peter, although he vaguely feels that he had met him somewhere before. He then makes a certain gesture that is crucial to the meaning of the play (until then Conrad did not participate in the network of mutual spiritual support, did not see or understand it, possessed as he was by selfishness and pride that obliterated his ability to perceive the world in its truth):

*Conrad: Please, take this ring and sell it; and give
half of the proceeds to the poor
Use the other half to arrange for a Mass for those
suffering in purgatory
I know how they suffer; if purgatory means
unfreedom—
Who knows whether I will ever be allowed to be
present at Mass
Father Peter: You will be.*

The exalted, sublime, and lonely Romantic Poet, having experienced help from the network of prayer (his deceased mother prays for him in the other world, and he is also a beneficiary of prayers by Eva who reads his poetry), becomes part of this network and hears the words of prophetic comfort from Father Peter.

It is my opinion that the strength of Mickiewicz's drama, its uniqueness in our literature, consists not only in that Poland's fate is inscribed in it, but also, and primarily, in that Mickiewicz confirms here the existence and operation of the Polish principle: the community of the living and the dead and their experience. Until the time of Karol Wojtyła, no one in Polish culture had presented so courageous and soul-stirring a vision of Polishness.

6

How do I know that the vision is true and correct? Obviously what *is* transcends the mere senses and mere human mind. The *being* of the world is deeper than the three-dimensional world. We bear witness to that in Poland when we visit the graves of those who have died, even if these visits sometimes become, like our Faith, a mere tradition and an empty ritual because rituals never fully die. As long as we straighten out candles on the graves and clean the gravestones, we witness to that Polish principle and its compelling nature. Visiting the cemetery on either All Saints' Day or All Souls' Day amounts to a voluntary participation in the ritual of *dziady*. We feel the bond with our ancestors. As we travel to the graves of those who died before us we accept, profess, and confirm that we are not alone; that continuity exists between those who still breathe and those who have entered a reality at this point closed to us; that the possibility exists of communication between these two categories of people; that they can help each other, be related to each other in spite of the gravest trial of all: the trial of invisibility, disappearance, absence in our being here and now.

Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady Part III* grows out of this soil, it witnesses to this kind of perception. Owing to the power of art, it is also the best articulation of this Polish principle we have inherited. *Dziady Part III* is not only literature, but also a way of witnessing, a sign, a reference point for us. Δ



Scots in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 16th-18th Centuries

The Formation and the Disappearance of an Ethnic Group

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There has been increasing scholarly attention on the extent and character of Scottish migration throughout the nation's history. T. M. Devine, who closed his Scotland Trilogy with a wide-ranging examination of Scots travels in *To the Ends of the Earth* (London, 2011), has marked out this trend most clearly. This and attendant work have been driven by an increasingly politicized engagement with the migrants and their descendants who comprise the Scottish diaspora. In 2009 a report commissioned by the Scottish government estimated that between 28 million and 40 million people worldwide claim Scottish descent. Most of these claimants are descendants of the "Great European Migration," when in the period 1815 to 1914 an estimated 55 to 60 million migrants left Europe for the New World nations of South America, North America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Australasia. Around 11 million people left England, Wales and Scotland in this period, with Scotland's share being around 2.3 million. While that number of Scots is not insignificant in raw terms, Scotland's migration history gains its place within international analysis when measured in per capita terms. Taking that measurement, Scotland is in the top three emigrant nations along with Ireland and Norway. If migration into England is factored in, then Scotland makes a case to be considered as Europe's greatest exporter of people in the modern age.

Yet it was to Ireland and mainland Europe that Scots first migrated in any numbers. It is with